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☆ SEP 9 1937 ☆ Thursday, September 9, 1937.

U. S. Department of Agriculture
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Subject: "Electric Ovens." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture and various agricultural experiment stations.

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Three of my friends have recently bought electric ranges, and each one is different. Each housekeeper chose a type that seemed to be suited to her particular needs and kitchen limitations. I assume that all three were well advised on the construction features, such as sturdy rigid steel frames, easily cleaned parts, good surface units, and so on. The ovens were what interested me most in these ranges.

Anna is a bride of three months. She has a two-room apartment with a tiny kitchen and the compact box-type of range was about the only style she could consider. It's set directly on the floor without legs, with the oven below the switch plate, under the surface units, and the broiling oven under that.

"Don't you have to stoop down pretty far, Anna, to look into your baking oven or to turn your roast around?" I asked.

Anna looked somewhat astonished. "Why, yes," she said. "I suppose I do. I never thought of it. You see, I don't have roasts very often, and I haven't tried to make a cake yet. I can make biscuits, though."

"And you're young and limber and don't mind practically squatting on the floor to cook a steak or lamb chop," I thought, but kept discreetly silent.

Janet is one of those housekeepers who likes to have everything behind cupboard doors and out of sight. She also likes to have all the working surfaces in her kitchen about the same height so she can set things down readily or spread out plates for filling when she entertains, which happens quite often. The buffet or table-top type of electric range just suits her. Below the surface units and switch plate there is a warming oven and a drawer for pots and pans. The baking oven is at one side of the surface units and its top is level with them. The broiling oven is under the large oven, but it is not as close to the floor as Anna's, for the whole stove is set on short legs. Janet has to stoop to the broiling oven and lean over to look in the baking oven, but she doesn't have to squat.

Then Mary's choice was the console type of range standing on tall legs. The baking oven is at one side of the surface units, raised above them, and even the broiling oven is as high as the upper shelf of either Anna's or Janet's oven.

So much for the three types of ranges my friends have chosen. Now I asked Miss Holbrook, household equipment specialist of the Bureau of Home Economics

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to give me her ideas about ovens for electric ranges. I asked her, "How large an oven should one choose?".

Miss Holbrook said: "There isn't a great deal of choice in size. Most ovens are 14 or 15 inches high but the heating units and baffle take up 3 to 5 inches of that. Ovens are 17 to 19 inches deep and 14, 16 or 18 inches wide. A large oven costs more to preheat and to operate than a smaller one. So it's practical to try the pans and casseroles you are likely to use in the oven at one time, to see what is the smallest size you will need.

"The thickness of the oven door and walls differs in the various makes of electric stoves. It has much to do with their economical and efficient operation. Good insulation of mineral wool or asbestos is important. The insulating material should be from 1 and 3/4 to 2 inches thick and of uniform density. 'Blanket' insulation is preferred because it won't settle. It is called 'blanket' because it is wrapped around the oven. Since the purchaser can't actually see the insulation she has to take the dealer's word for the way it is made.

"The quality of the outer casing of the oven and of the material used for lining contributes to effective insulation as well as to durability. And the oven door must fit tightly to hold in every bit of heat."

I asked Miss Holbrook also, which is better, an enamel or a steel oven lining?

"That's something for the individual purchaser to decide," she said. "The choice seems to be between cost of heating and ease of cleaning. Enameled linings cost more for current than steel ones - approximately one cent more each time the oven is heated and operated for an hour. But enameled linings are much easier to clean than metal surfaces. Polished metal surfaces soon tarnish with use and become less efficient. The aluminum paint on steel linings will wear off."

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Among the other features of electric ovens/should one look for? She mentioned an oven temperature control and maybe a time clock. This, however, adds to the cost, and the housewife must consider whether or not the time control feature would be used often enough to justify its purchase.

I also asked if it makes any difference whether the oven is on the left or right of the range.

Miss Holbrook said that that's largely a matter of individual preference and habit of work, also of the place where the range is to stand. In the case of the console type, the oven must be on the side that will not interfere with light or cooking surface. Naturally the door must open conveniently without hitting anything. Some people like to move things to a table or counter at the right as they take them out of the oven, some to the left. There's a point about using the oven that does make a difference in cost though.

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Investigators at the Indiana Agricultural Experiment Station at Purdue made some tests last year on electric ranges and found that for baking periods of less than an hour in length it cost more to preheat the oven than to do the baking. Consequently it is not economical to heat an electric oven up for just one food, such as biscuits, which cook in 15 or 20 minutes. The way to get the most use out of an electric oven for the least current cost is to cook several things at the same time. They need not all be for the same meal. For instance, when a person heats the oven for breakfast biscuits, she might plan to bake some apples for dessert for dinner, and even put in some potatoes to scoop out and stuff later, or cook a casserole dish which could be reheated on the top of the range just before serving.

Another thing: In baking many foods in the electric oven, the switch may be turned off before cooking is actually finished, and the heat retained by the oven will do the rest.

Miss Holbrook promised to give me some further suggestions about selecting and using an electric range and the utensils that give best results. I'll have to save them for another talk, as time is up.
